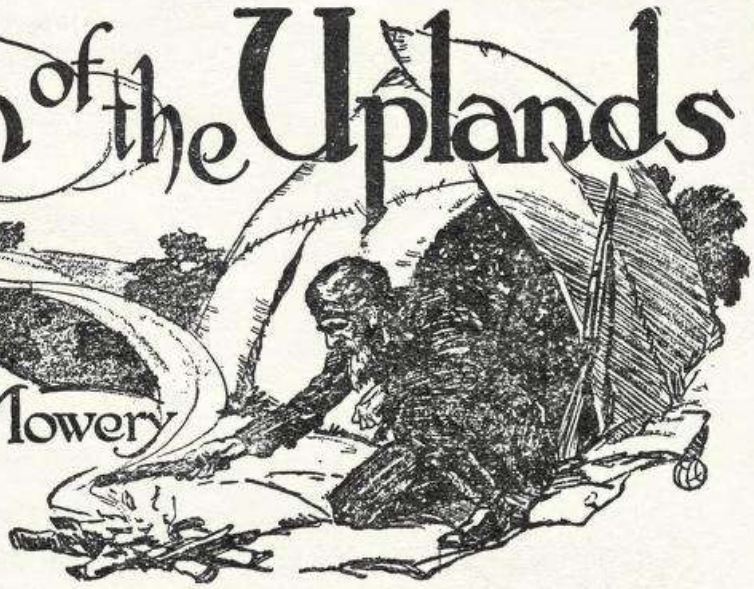
A Cain of the Uplands



by William Byron Mowery

Author of "Matched Silvers"

THERE was not one person in the crude court room at Nigishun who did not know the verdict would be *guilty*. There was not one person who sympathized with Harvey Duss, as he sat with bowed head, not daring to look into the eyes of the Labrador "liveyeres" on the benches of the court room.

"To be hanged by the neck until dead, and may God have mercy upon your soul," were the measured words of Judge Pyre, up from Rigolette for the trial.

There was no out-cry in the room; only a low murmur of satisfaction with the just finding of the Law. Cunliffe Lovett, brother and only relative of the murdered man, rose up and thanked the Judge and the jury; and quietly left the court room. Deputy Tas French and a volunteer led the shackled prisoner out of the box. The anxious faces of the Judge, the sheriff, and the jury foreman cleared up as the rough audience peacefully dissolved into groups of two and three.

The murder of Donald Lovett had been brutal and without shadow of justification. It had come out of the rivalry of the Duss trading-post and the cooperative store sponsored and managed by the Lovett brothers. For fifteen years Harvey Duss had run his independent post at Nigishun. The only trader within seventy-five miles, he had got a strangle-hold on the fishers and trappers, the liveyeres* of the near coast and the Nigishun R.. .. valley.

*Liveyeres those who "live here" the year around. The Newfoundland fishermen stay on the Labrador coast only through the cod season.

The evil credit system showed itself in its worst light under Duss. He had enslaved the people that were forced to trade with him at the post. The Crees, Micmacs, and Nascaupees, who borrowed their Winters' supplies, were forced to sell their Spring furs to Duss at the trader's own prices. They were always in his debt, sinking deeper and deeper each year. When they tried to sell their furs elsewhere and pay him cash, he cut off their supplies and starved them. The untaught liveyeres, always living from hand to mouth along this "Starvation Coast," fared no better than the Indians. Many a trapper at the end of ten Winters' hard work asked for a settlement, and found himself three or four thousand dollars in debt to the trader.

A handful of young unmarried trappers and fishermen had led the revolt. The Lovett brothers, who had got a slight education at the St. John's Mission Orphantage, and who had caught the idea of the cooperative post from a highly successful one three hundred miles down the coast, had set the store on its feet by careful management and by fearlessly bucking the established system. Without them, particularly without Donald Lovett, the store would have gone under in its first days.

Harvey Duss was a fighter. He had an overwhelming ambition to lead men, to use them to his own advantage. He reveled in lashing the whip over the men in his power. The lonely life of the bush-trapper would

have been a daily death to him. He was a city product, a man who lived on the labor of other men, and found fraternity with other men sweet—and profitable.

When he realized the Lovett store was rescuing the liveyeres from his clutches and that Donald Lovett was his match in shrewdness, his plans turned to murder. Not by his own hand; he had a streak of physical cowardice which kept him from meeting the elder Lovett face to face and killing him. He planned another scheme—one that he thought would cover up his tracks.

Along with his other lines, he traded in huskies. Always there was a gang of ten to twelve half-starved dogs around the post house at the foot of the sheltering cliff. That October day of the murder, when the offals around the fish stages had played out and before he had put the huskies on their Winter rations, they were vicious, surly, and dangerous.

Walking alone down the shore of the Tickle, Donald Lovett was caught defenceless and torn to pieces by the Duss pack, scarcely a quarter of a mile from the cabin of Rene Radin, where he had been headed. Radin had seen Duss take the pack into a larch thicket overlooking the Tickle path and had seen him hurry away from the spot after Donald Lovett had gone down beneath the dozen slashing, bloodthirsty huskies.

Lovett had a reason for going to Rene Radin's cabin; and that reason was Marie Radin. They were to have been married Thanksgiving Day. Rene Radin knew better than to let his daughter see the mangled figure after he had shot and clubbed the huskies away from it. He was a shrewd old man—Rene Radin. He loved both the Lovett brothers as if they had been his own sons; and after the death of Donald, he asked Cunliffe to visit him often evenings, and help him keep Marie from grieving.

The evening after the trial and verdict, Deputy French and his volunteer aid started to take the condemned man down the coast to Rigolette for safe keeping. The trio started in a fishing boat, expecting to make the trip down by noon the next day.

But the next afternoon the little fishing boat was back in Nigishun Tickle with the news that the prisoner had escaped during the night—had slipped overboard without a ripple or a splash and swum ashore.

There was a stormy meeting that night in the Lovett store. The men had let the Law have the murderer, and the Law had let him escape. Deputy French and his aid were threatened.

Rene Radin rose and spoke to the point. Harvey Duss was to be shot on sight, if and when he showed up at any trapper's shack or fisherman's cabin or trading-post. He could not go down the coast and escape without showing himself in that eight hundred mile trip. Word would be sent north to Chidley and all down the east bay coast by the late Fall steamer. The man would be trapped; would be penned up in the wilderness. The posts were few and scattered. Duss was known at every one of them. He could not escape. He would know better than to try—till starvation and Winter brought him in.

The spot where he had gone ashore was just off the mouth of a small river. It was almost impossible to travel along the rocky coast on foot. Back in the interior in the deer bush and boulder swells, it would be possible for a man to live a while on the bake-apple berry, the dwarf-cranberry, and the small game he could snare or club.

Two weeks passed without a sign or movement from the missing murderer, and the first deep snow fell. Cunliffe Lovett believed that Harvey Duss was living back in the interior close to Nigishun, and would have to come in shortly. His fierce desire for revenge settled into a steady, grim purpose. Personally he saw that the plan of Rene Radin was carried out. There was not a cabin, shack, or trading-post on the northeast coast or down the east bay coast that had not heard of the escape and was looking for the murderer to show his face. Word of the five hundred dollars reward for Harvey Duss *dead* was bruited up and down the coast; and kept the liveyeres on the alert.

Marie Radin helped him manage the post store, enlarged since there was no competition from Duss. Between them at first there was that community of feeling which comes from a common loss. They were together almost every day of the long Winter. Rene Radin was a shrewd old man, and he liked Cun[illegible] Lovett almost as much as ever he liked the elder brother. With no whit less loyalty to his dead

brother, Cunliffe began to hope that Marie Radin might become Marie Lovett. He knew Donald would have it so. The shrewdness of Radin was in turning Marie's thoughts from the memory of Donald to Cunliffe. When Spring came, there was a substantial rumor afloat that Marie had promised to marry Cunliffe. Not a trapper came into the post with his Winter's catch, but said it was a good thing.

But Marie had not promised Cunliffe definitely. He sensed that she would not marry him till he had found and punished the murderer of his brother. And he found no fault with her stand on the matter.

One day in the late Spring, when the snow had gone, when the "swiling" ships had come up from St. Johns, picked up men and gone "down north" to the fields of sea ice, and the cod and peal were starting to come in, a solitary Cree slipped in to the post with a small catch of fur. Cunliffe wondered why he had brought in his catch so long after the other Crees had come and gone. The grub and articles that the Indian wanted in trade were peculiar; they were things the Crees did not use—a rifle, ammunition, an ax, cooking-utensils and white man's food.

Cunliffe questioned the Cree closely, but found out nothing from his monosyllabic answers. With his suspicions aroused, he gave the Indian a bottle of ninety-proof gin and got him drunk in half an hour. He found out what he wanted to know. With four fingers of the gin in him, the Cree got communicative.

He had been sent in with the fur by a white man living up in the interior almost to the Ungava Height of Land. The white man had cautioned him against telling who had sent him or whom he was getting the supplies for. The Indian's description fitted but one man—Harvey Duss.

All of Cunliffe Lovett's bitter hate of the man flared out when he learned that the murderer had managed to survive in the wilderness through the inexorable Winter and was planning on hiding there permanently, to judge from the supplies and equipment he had sent for through his messenger. He got the approximate location of the shack from the Indian; and let him sleep off his drunk behind the stove while he went down to the beach where Radin was working on a fish-stage.

"It's a long trip to Otelnuk at the Height of Land," Radin told him. "You and I will go, because the matter is one for you and me alone to settle. How the rat-face ever got back up there—ten days' swift travel with the komatik in Winter—is more than I know. He is the first white man to see that lake. Only the Crees and Nascaupees of the Upper Nascaupee can tell you about it."

"But can you stand that long trip?" Cunliffe asked.

Radin laughed.

"When Harvey Duss is at the other end of the trail, I can go as far as you can. Go now and get ready. Give that Cree his supplies and send him back tonight. He will travel quicker than we can. Slip into one of the packages one of the reward signs."

Cunliffe said good-by to Marie that evening.

"Don't take any risks, you and daddy," she told him. "But remember the way Donald died."

"I remember," Cunliffe assured her, "and so does our *pere* Radin. When I come back, we can take that trip to St. Johns and feel that Donald is revenged to the full."

"I wouldn't take it otherwise," she replied, with a passion that revealed to Cunliffe the elemental woman.

LOVETT and Radin traveled up the shallow Nigishun for seventy-five miles, toting past the heart-breaking portages and dizzy rapids, paddling across deep lakes through which the river ran, and poling through narrow gorges cut out of the solid rock. They were four days covering that stretch. On the fifth day they cached the canoe and struck directly into the deer bush for the Height of Land country where the mighty, unknown Otelnuk lay.

The trip even to them was a nightmare. Mosquitoes from the thousands of hidden lakes buzzed in swarms around them. Their bites were like the touch of red-hot wires. At night they pattered like rain on the small pup tent. There was no keeping them out, no driving them away with smoke. Face, neck, ankles, and hands were covered black with them. Their bites carried no fever in that latitude, but they swelled up and got inflamed. They were a

torture at every step. There was nothing to do but endure them.

On the higher terraces and boulder swells where cold eastern winds swept across from the great bay, the mosquitoes could not live; but there the deer flies took their place and were even worse. They bit so deeply that the blood ran. They could bite through the clothing that the men wore. They settled on every exposed surface and stuck with the tenacity of a leech. They could not be scared away; they had to be smashed. They hit the travelers in the face with the impact of a hornet. In their great numbers and savageness they were more than a nuisance; they were dangerous, because they sucked so much blood. Many days in the infested terraces the men could not have stood.

Food was scarce. The caribou, mysterious Labrador wanderers, had erratically migrated somewhere. During the whole trip Cunliffe and Radin saw not one. The chortle-berry, the bake-apple and the wild huckleberry were small and green. The rabbit and willow grouse had disappeared before the hordes of mice. It was a mouse year in the uplands. There were myriads of the great, gray fellows, big almost as rats, nesting under every stone. They swarmed around the granite boulders and undermined the reindeer-moss with innumerable runways. Literally they ate up the country. There was nothing for the rabbit or ptarmigan to live on. They swam across the streams after night and were dragged down by the fish till the fish were inedible. They tasted mousey. Even the half-pound fontenalis gorged them.

For the foxes, the lynxes, the wolves and the bears it was a great season. Cunliffe shot a black bear, after watching him turn over little flat rocks and smack the scurrying mice with his huge paw. But the bear meat had the musty odor of mice and, though fat and tender, was inedible.

For twelve days Cunliffe and Radin headed west, climbing into the Height of Land country. A great pile of deer bones, crushed to get out the marrow, was the only human sign they saw. The scattered, thin bands of Crees and Nascaupees and the Micmacs themselves rarely wandered that far away from the fringe of civilization along the coast. The deer-bush got scrubbier, the moss played out completely, there was no longer larch or balsam or spruce except in spots—nothing but desolate gray boulder-swells, leaden skies, bare slopes, chilly winds, and torturing insects.

On the morning of the thirteenth day, Cunliffe climbed a high terrace and looked twenty miles to the west upon a great body of water of which he could not see the western shore at all. He called Radin up the slope and they talked it over.

There was no doubt it was the uncharted Otelnuk, Turtle Lake, of the far-roving Micmacs. The "turtle's" head was a broad round estuary running out of sight into a range of hills. On the near side two flappers extended miles back into the hills. In the middle of the lake a row of small granite islands stuck up like spines in the back of an Eocene monster.

"He lives at the head of Otelnuk," Cunliffe said, pointing at the distant water.

"We will hurry up and camp on the lake tonight," Radin replied. "We must turn north to miss the northeast flapper. Tomorrow we will look for the shack and Harvey Duss."

They were appalled when they approached the lake that afternoon. It was damp and chilly for miles around. The great body of water chilled the warm winds from the southeast; in that late season it still had slob ice floating in it. A bank of low clouds hung over the lake, shutting out the sunlight and spitting a slow rain at times. Dwarf balsam stood clumped together here and there; the rest of the ground was bare or covered with a wiry grass that had sharp, cutting leaves. The desolate country was a bleak, cheerless, monotonous expanse of low hills and rocky hollows.

"Not even an Indian within one hundred miles of this God-forsaken lake!" Cunliffe exclaimed. "The rat-face certainly did pick a safe spot, but how under heaven did he get up here?"

"Probably picked up with some Indians that brought him most of the way. He is in mortal terror of getting discovered and hanged or shot, or he wouldn't have chosen such a place as this to live in, or stay so far from the coast. He was a sociable man—in his way."

BY EVENING they had come out upon the wind-swept beach and had traveled well up along the neck of the "turtle." They camped in a little rocky gorge to cut off any view of their fire.

It rained continually all night; and the morning chill pierced to the bone.

Carefully and slowly they edged up around the lake. The Cree had given them only an approximate location of the shack. They kept well back into the deer bush.

At the top of a little boulder-swell that afternoon, Cunliffe stood behind a rock and looked up along the beach slope. He motioned excitedly to Radin, who was climbing up behind him. Radin looked where Cunliffe pointed.

A lop-sided shack was partly hidden in a clump of black balsam, a quarter of a mile ahead of them. A thin wisp of smoke curled up from the clump.

At sight of the figure chopping wood behind the shack, Cunliffe raised his heavy caribou rifle to his shoulder. Radin stopped him.

"Fool, he didn't shoot Donald, did he? Let's get closer and think up something better than *that!*"

They crept up through the balsam till they were scarcely fifty yards away. The shack was a crazy one, mud-plastered, the work of a man without tools or skill. They could not, even at that short distance, recognize the man as Harvey Duss, except by his stature and gait.

He was clothed in a tattered array of cloth and skins. His hair was long and shaggy; his beard concealed his face. He coughed as he chopped.

Cunliffe nudged Radin.

"Lunger. This lake did it."

Radin nodded.

In a few minutes the man quit chopping, went into the cabin, got a new rifle that Cunliffe recognized, and started down along the beach. He disappeared half a mile away.

"Let's have a look around that shack," said Radin. "Be careful and don't leave any tracks."

Some chips and animal bones were scattered about in front of the door, and smelled strongly. The whole shack had a bad odor. They had to stoop to get through the small door. There was no floor or window—nothing but a hole in the roof for the smoke to go out. The fire-place was a few stones in a corner of the hut. There were wide cracks in the walls where the mud had dropped out. A palette of criss-cross limbs was raised a few inches off the ground. Some wolf and caribou skins were tacked together for bed-clothes. The shack had a sickening musty odor that was almost intolerable.

The reward sign was tacked on the inside of the door.

"He keeps it there in front of him as a reminder of what would happen to him if he ever goes in to civilization," said Radin. "Do you see, he's fixing the shack up to stay here?"

"Yes, I noticed that. He'll stay here all right, but he won't have to worry about the shack or anything else."

Rene Radin reflected, staring at the sign.

"Is the worst possible death any too good for the man that put those huskies on Donald Lovett? Don't you think it would be more than foolish to shoot him?"

"Foolish to shoot him?"

"Would *you* rather die quickly by that rifle of yours, or stay here in this hole by this infernal lake, cut off from everybody, with a Cree to go in to the Post for you once a year—to stay here till you died from that cough?"

"He has only a couple years of that torture at the most, though," Cunliffe interrupted.

"But two years—when you're a lunger," Radin pursued.

"Why did we come up here?"

"To revenge Donald and to revenge him to the full. Now we must get out of here before he comes back."

At dusk a chill rain set in. From the dripping thicket they watched Duss come back, empty-handed from his hunt. He squatted over a smoky fire outside and cooked his supper, rather than fill the shack with smoke.

The watchers saw him take a folded scrap of newspaper from his pocket, read it several times by the fire-light, and put it away again. Cunliffe recognized it as a part of the old paper he had used in wrapping the parcel of lassy pork-bun that the Indian had brought back.

The wisdom of Radin's advice dawned gradually upon Cunliffe. To leave him unmolested and go back to the post would be infinitely fuller a revenge than the swift one he had been counting upon taking at the first sight of the murderer. Cut off from white men and even Indians, living on the desolate flat lake, and already a lunger, the man would experience a thousand deaths in his brief time left.

Radin clasped his arm.

"Are you ready to go back?"

Cunliffe fingered his rifle nervously.

"Will you tell Marie that Donald has been revenged to the full?"

"Yes. I promise you for her."

"Then, I will go back and leave him here."

THE two men struck hands. Silently they crept out of the thicket and slipped back into the swells. Half a mile away, on a low hill, they stopped and looked back through the dusk.

A solitary figure, holding his coat over his head to keep off the rain, was squatting over a smoky fire.

BUCKO

by Frederic Campbell

NIGHT. The seas are sweeping the *Susie Mann* with the hammering rush that is the Bay of Biscay's trade-mark; and the hurricane is going through her cordage with the howl only heard on a windjammer which is trying to plumb —— with her bowsprit while she kicks the black sky with her stern. The captain and second mate got caught between the rail and ten tons of sea-water this forenoon; the first mate's getting two hours' rest after a day and a half on his feet. The third officer has the deck—his first trip since he got his ticket—and the big dago that shipped at Limehouse has refused to go aloft.

A glare of lightning illumines the deck. The third sees the rest of the men watching him, wondering what he'll do. He's only eighteen, but—he's an officer. They're trying him out. Something swells to bursting inside his chest, and he jumps for the dago's throat.

That was a knife—just slit his shoulder. His head bumps against the Italian's teeth; he swings his right upward, and feels it jar the bristly chin. The dago has him around the waist, when a great sea picks up both men, carries them twenty feet, and hurls them into the scuppers.

Pitchy dark. Why is the dago so limp? He wouldn't go aloft—must have hit his head on something——

"I'll teach the sons of dogs," says the third mate unprintably; and, with the sagging body of his enemy over his shoulder, staggers, between seas, to the weather shrouds.

In another flare of blue light, the watch sees him carrying the mutineer up the foremast ratlines; in a momentary lull of the gale they hear fragments of a shout "Show you—go—aloft—swine!" The bosun, staring into the impenetrable black, recognizes an old whaling trick, and wonders where the kid learned it. No monkey business with this third. Mast-heading him. . . .

To the streaming foretopmast crosstrees, as the mast-head swings in sickening arcs through the chaos of sleet, the third-mate lashes the dago; and descends to the deck as the first mate comes on watch, shuddering and half-awake. Into his ear the third screams news; then stumbles off to his cabin. He's white-faced with exhaustion, and his soaked bed looks tempting; but he goes into the alleyway, which groans, creaks, heaves, and runs with seeped water, looking for the ship's cat. He finds her, draggled and cold, a stringy black-and-white with pink eyes, outside the door behind which the Old Man groans, and picks her up.

"Poor pussy—come on to bed. Cold ol' night, for a li'l cat. Come on, puss——"

Still in his oilskins, he falls into his bunk; and while, fifty feet up in the icy night, the awakening dago shivers and screams, the third mate goes to sleep; the pink-eyed cat purring and carding as she snuggles her nose into his neck.